

IN THE CLAIMS

For the convenience of the Examiner, all claims have been presented whether or not an amendment has been made. The claims have been amended as follows:

1. **(Currently Amended)** A method, performed by a returns provider, of enabling a customer to ship a package containing one or more items previously acquired from a merchant during a unique transaction, comprising the step of:

providing using one or more computer-systems to provide the customer with a return label to be placed on the package, the label containing a shipping destination of the package and integrated machine readable data representing at least a shipping origin of the package and identification of the transaction;

using a shipping carrier service to transport the package to the shipping destination, the package shipped to the shipping destination using “reverse zone skipping” as the shipping destination is a carrier center near a returns center associated with the returns provider; and

receiving, by the returns provider, the package at the carrier center for transportation to the returns center.

2. **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the returns provider is the merchant.

3. **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the returns provider is a service provider to the merchant.

4. **(Currently Amended)** The method of Claim 1, wherein at least a portion of the return label conforms to ~~the USPS~~ **one or more USPS** merchandise return service specifications.

5. **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the providing step is performed by enclosing the return label with items shipped to the customer.

6. **(Original)** The method of Claim 5, wherein the return label is attached to an invoice for the item.

7. **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the providing step is performed by the customer downloading data from the Internet for printing the label.

8. **(Currently Amended)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the shipping origin of the package is represented by the customer's postal code, and the method further comprises assessing a shipping charge for the package using the customer's postal code as identified from the machine readable data.

9. **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the machine readable data is barcode data.

10. **(Currently Amended)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the machine readable data is electrical circuitry comprising a radio frequency ~~identification data~~ identification tag.

11. **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the return label further has a human readable code representing merchant-specific data.

12. **(Cancelled)**

13. **(Currently Amended)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the returns provider maintains multiple returns destinations, ~~and wherein the shipping destination is to a location closest to the customer.~~

14. **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the purchase identification data is an invoice number.

15. **(Original)** The method of Claim 12, wherein the machine readable data further represents merchant-specific data.

16. **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the machine readable data further represents customer specific data.

17. **(Original)** The method of Claim 14, wherein the machine readable data further represents product specific data.

18. **(Original)** The method of Claim 14, wherein the machine readable data further represents trading partner data.

19. **(Original)** The method of Claim 14, wherein the machine readable data further represents disposition data.

20. **(Currently Amended)** A method of enabling a customer to ship a package containing one or more items previously purchased from a merchant during a unique purchase transaction, comprising the steps of:

providing using one or more computer-systems to provide the customer with a return label to be placed on the package, the label containing a shipping destination of the package and integrated machine readable data representing at least a shipping origin of the package and identification of the purchase transaction; ~~and~~

notifying using one or more computer-systems to notify the customer that, by using the return label, returns are pre-authorized and that carrier costs are due subsequent to the initiation of the return;

using a shipping carrier service to transport the package to the shipping destination, the package shipped to the shipping destination using "reverse zone skipping" as the shipping destination is a carrier center near a returns center associated with the returns provider; and

receiving, by the returns provider, the package at the carrier center for transportation to the returns center.

21. **(Original)** The method of Claim 20, wherein the notifying step is performed at least in part by visual indicia on the return label.

22. **(Original)** The method of Claim 20, further comprising the step of using the machine readable data to assess shipping charges.

23. **(Original)** The method of Claim 20, further comprising the step of using the machine readable data to communicate information about the return to the merchant.

24. **(Original)** The method of Claim 20, further comprising the step using the machine readable data to communicate information about the return to the customer.

25. **(New)** The method of Claim 1, further comprising:
prior to receiving the package at the carrier center near the returns center, receiving the package at a first carrier station nearest the customer; and
using the shipping carrier service to transport the package from the first carrier station to the final destination at the carrier station near the returns center for pickup by a returns provider.

26. **(New)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the carrier station near the returns center comprises a regional bulk mail center closest to a location of the returns provider.

27. **(New)** The method of Claim 26, further comprising:
assessing a shipping charge for the package to calculate the shipping charge for transporting the package from a postal code associated with the customer to the regional bulk mail center.